



Committee on  
**HOMELAND SECURITY**  
Chairman Michael McCaul

*Opening Statement*

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**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Susan W. Brooks (R-IN)  
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications  
Committee on Homeland Security**

**“Emergency MGMT 2.0: How #SocialMedia & New Tech are Transforming Preparedness,  
Response, & Recovery #Disasters #Part1 #Privatesector”**

**Remarks as Prepared**

In today’s technology driven world, social media and other types of new technology are becoming one of the primary ways we receive, process, and relay information. Studies have shown that more than 60% of the people in the United States have at least one social media account, with many having multiple accounts to include Facebook pages, Twitter profiles, and Pinterest boards. While social media originally started out as a way to share information among friends, it is evident that it has evolved to serve other functions, such as a prevalent source for news, advertising, and entertainment.

Another evolving role, and the subject of this hearing, is its use in preparing for, responding to and recovering from disasters. We have heard numerous stories from Hurricane Sandy and the Boston Bombings of how citizens used Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to relay information to first responders, communicate with loved ones, and request assistance when cell phone service was unavailable. According to the 2013 National Preparedness Report, which was released by FEMA last week, during Hurricane Sandy, “users sent more than 20 million Sandy-related Twitter posts, or ‘tweets,’ despite the loss of cellphone service during the peak of the storm.”

We have also seen how response organizations are using social media to quickly share public safety information and maintain direct communication with disaster survivors during and after an incident. The Center for Naval Analyses conducted a survey of the use of social media by emergency management agencies and found that 77 percent of survey respondents use social media, with 55 percent setting the goal of monitoring social media during an event.

For example, during the devastating tornado in Oklahoma last month, the cities of Moore and Oklahoma City used their Twitter accounts to relay real time updates on open shelters, road closures, lost and found pets, and personal items. They also actively monitored their twitter accounts and responded to requests for assistance posted by disaster survivors.

I personally found that during the severe flooding that occurred in my district in April, the Indiana Department of Homeland Security used Facebook and Twitter to relay information to my constituents, such as how to report damage and where to get assistance, which was very effective and proved to be more efficient than using traditional media avenues, like television and radio. I personally posted information on my Facebook page to inform constituents about the flooding and federal assistance available.

Social media is not the only thing that is transforming how we prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. In January of this year, I had the opportunity to travel to Silicon Valley with some of my colleagues. On that trip, we met with companies on the leading edge of new technology that are also contributing to the preparation, response and recovery from disasters – two are represented here today, Google and Palantir. It was amazing to see the innovation and ingenuity being used by the private sector. It gave me hope and filled me with excitement to sit with representatives from these companies and talk not only about what they are doing, but what they are planning and thinking about for the future. The management of “big data” and the use of social media provide enormous opportunities for efficiencies in emergency management and I believe that these companies and organizations before us can make a difference in how this country is able to prepare for and respond to disasters.

While there are numerous examples of how social media and new technology have enhanced emergency management activities, I would be remiss to not point out that there are pitfalls of which we need to be wary. For example, recent events have shown us how misleading, faulty, or malicious information can escalate quickly on social media sites and negatively affect response efforts. We have also seen that social media can be used to spread messages of hate. Immediately after the recent terror attack in London the attackers actually engaged those with cameras knowing that their message would make its way to YouTube and broadcast around the world. We must also be cognizant on the limitations of technology, such as its reliance on power sources and internet connections.

I am pleased to welcome our distinguished panel of witnesses and look forward to hearing your perspectives on this topic.

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